



OPCW

Review Conference

Fifth Session
15 – 19 May 2023

RC-5/NAT.4
15 May 2023
ENGLISH only

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MARJOLIJN VAN DEELEN SPECIAL
ENVOY FOR DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION AT THE FIFTH
SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO
REVIEW THE OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION**

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Representatives of chemical industry and civil society,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro and Ukraine, the potential candidate country Georgia as well as the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area) align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco, and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

The European Union (EU) warmly congratulates H.E. Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast for his election as the Chairperson of the Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (Fifth Review Conference). We are confident that your wisdom and experience will pave the way for a successful outcome. We would like to assure you of our full support in steering the work of the Conference.

The European Union would also like to pay tribute to H.E. Ambassador Lauri Kuusing, Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group. We commend him for his efforts and outstanding performance in chairing the meetings in a transparent and inclusive manner, and for preparing a solid basis for the Chairperson's draft provisional text.

The European Union reiterates its full support to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and underlines its unique contribution to the goal and objective of the United Nations Charter for a peaceful world order. Strong universal support to the OPCW and its work has been expressed by the United Nations General Assembly in resolutions adopted in October 2022 and February 2023.

Chemical weapons continue to pose a grave threat to international peace and security. The use or threat of use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time, and under any circumstances must be unequivocally condemned, and those responsible must and will be held



accountable. Safeguarding the global norm against the use of chemical weapons and countering their re-emergence is a shared obligation of all States Parties. Silence and inaction are not an option.

At this Fifth Review Conference, it is imperative to reiterate without ambiguity that Syria has repeatedly used chemical weapons over the past years, causing numerous victims. The comprehensive and thorough investigations carried out by the United Nations and OPCW substantiate the failure of the Syrian regime to comply with its international obligations under the Convention, and its willingness to breach them. We urge again Syria to finally comply with the Convention. Syria must fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons stockpiles and programme and allow the unfettered access of OPCW staff to verify it has done so, in accordance with its obligations under United Nations resolution 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We also call on the Russian Federation to stop shielding the Syrian regime from accountability for its use of chemical weapons, including through campaigns of disinformation.

As members of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, the European Union and its Member States are committed to ensuring full accountability for those responsible for these heinous crimes.

The European Union condemns in the strongest possible terms the poisoning of the Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny in August 2020 with a nerve agent from the novichok group. We continue to call on the Russian Federation to provide substantive answers to the questions posed by 45 States Parties under Article IX and without further delay investigate the assassination attempt on Mr Navalny in full transparency, and to fully cooperate with the OPCW to ensure an impartial international investigation.

Furthermore, Russia's unjustifiable, unprovoked, and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine is a manifest violation of the United Nations Charter and international law. The EU resolutely condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's aggression and calls on Russia to withdraw all its troops, proxies and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. Russia's campaign of disinformation spreading unfounded allegations against Ukraine, and others regarding planned provocations involving chemical weapons use, is baseless and completely unacceptable. Ukraine is a responsible Member in full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

As we approach the completion of the destruction of the last remaining declared chemical weapons by the end of September this year, it is evident that the OPCW and the future implementation of the Convention face multiple challenges. We need to adapt the Convention verification regime to modern industry, and to reflect the rapid developments in science and technology, as highlighted in the valuable report of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB).

We need to ensure that the Organisation remains fit for purpose to effectively respond to these challenges, including through amendments to its tenure policy and through necessary knowledge management. In this context, the European Union emphasises the importance of achieving gender equality, diversity, and inclusivity within the OPCW Technical Secretariat, and urges States Parties to intensify their efforts in presenting qualified candidates for OPCW vacancies. A wide diversity of views within the Technical Secretariat is essential for informed decision-making and enhanced effectiveness. To this effect, we look forward to further

progress towards gender equality in the Organisation, including through the enhancement of gender mainstreaming in all areas of the Technical Secretariat's work. We also encourage continued efforts towards geographical diversity, in full compliance with Article VIII of the Convention.

The European Union warmly welcomes the timely inauguration of the new OPCW laboratory, the ChemTech Centre. As a force-multiplier, the centre will play a pivotal role in the implementation of the Convention by leveraging synergies between verification, training, and capacity-building efforts.

Furthermore, addressing the multiple challenges confronting the OPCW requires a predictable and solid financial base. The European Union calls upon all States Parties to fulfil their obligations and pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

The European Union also underscores the importance of engaging all relevant stakeholders, including the chemical industry, think tanks, civil society, and non-governmental organisations, in the work of the OPCW. Recognising the significant contributions they have made in support of the common objective of a world free of chemical weapons, we emphasise the need for their broadest possible, meaningful, and non-discriminatory participation in the Conference of the States Parties.

Mr Chairperson, the European Union is a strong supporter of the OPCW politically and financially. The EU together with its Member States is the biggest voluntary contributor in support of the OPCW activities, including capacity building. Today, we pledge to continue this support.

Thank you for your attention. I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document of the Fifth Review Conference and post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

--- 0 ---